

## The Empire and Christianity

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brought upon hundreds and thousands of men and women, whose services the State needed and would have done well to possess, but who cut themselves off from mundane affairs, and withdrew into solitudes, not to learn there how to help their fellow-men but consumed only with a selfish anxiety to escape from the wrath to come. They thought of nothing but the salvation of their own souls. It is impossible to see how these wild hermits, who peopled the Libyan deserts, were acceptable in the sight either of themselves, their fellows, or their God. Simon Stylites, starving sleepless on his pillar in the posture of prayer for weeks, remains for all time as a monument of grotesque futility. If charity regards him with pity, it can only regard with contempt those who imputed his insane endurance unto him for righteousness. No one can estimate the amount of unnecessary misery and sufferings caused by these extreme fanatics, who broke up homes without remorse, played on the fears and harrowed the minds of impressionable men and women, and debased the human soul in their frantic endeavour to fit it for the presence of its Maker. They stand in the same category as the gaunt skeletons who drag themselves on their knees from end to end of India in the hope of placating a mild but irresponsive god. Man's first duty may be towards God; but not to the exclusion of his duty towards the State.

It is not to be supposed, of course, that the majority of Christians were led to renounce the world and family life. The weaker brethren are